DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 051 CG 020 583

AUTHOR Mullis, Ronald L.; McKinley, Kathleen
TITLE Relations between Adolescent Gender Role Orientation, Self-Esteem and Social Conformity.
PUB DATE Nov 87
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations (49th, Atlanta, GA, November 14-19, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Age Differences; Androgyny; *Conformity; *Females; High School Students; Junior High School Students; *Locus of Control; Secondary Education; Self Concept; *Self Esteem; *Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes; Sexual Identity

ABSTRACT

Although previous research has established a relationship between gender role orientation and self-esteem, and gender role orientation and social conformity, few studies have established a clear relationship among all three constructs, especially for different age groups. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between adolescent gender role orientation, self-esteem, and locus of control utilizing two different age groups of adolescents. The sample was composed of junior high school and senior high school students from a rural midwestern state. Participants included 7th and 8th grade female students (N=87) and 11th and 12th grade female students (N=48). For each test group participants were categorized into a younger adolescent group (7th and 8th graders) and an older adolescent group (11th and 12th graders). Subjects completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Texas Social Behavior Inventory, and the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale for Children. Results indicated that adolescent females classified as androgynous or masculine in gender-role orientation had higher self-esteem than adolescents classified as feminine or undifferentiated. Further, junior high adolescents had more of an external locus of control whereas senior high adolescents had more of an internal locus of control. No other significant differences were found. (Author/ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ED291051

Relations Between Adolescent Gender Role Orientation, Self-Esteem and Social Conformity

Ronald L. Mullis, Ph.D. and Kathleen McKinley, MS

North Dakota State University

CG 020583

Ronald L. Mullis is Associate Professor of Child Development and Family Science and the Agricultural Experiment Station, North Dakota State University. Kathleen McKinley is an Adolescent Counselor in Tucson, Arizona.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ronald Mullis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relation between gender-role orientation, self-esteem, and locus of control in female adolescents. Eighty-seven female junior high school students and 48 female senior high school students completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Texas Social Behavior Inventory, and the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale for Children. Adolescent females classified as androgynous or masculine in gender-role orientation were found to have higher self-esteem than adolescents classified as feminine or undifferentiated. Further, junior high adolescents had more of an external locus of control whereas senior high adolescents had more of an internal locus of control. No other significant differences were found.

Relations Between Adolescent Gender Role Orientation, Self-Esteem and Social Conformity

Adolescence has been identified as a period in the life span during which the development of gender related roles is of primary importance for the development of self esteem and social conformity. For example, there is evidence that girls are more likely to have lower self-esteem than boys,[1] that high self-esteem in our society requires both masculinity and femininity, with a greater emphasis on masculinity than femininity for males and females alike,[2] and that conformity to gender role norms results in positive social adjustment for early adolescents and more difficulties in social adjustment for older adolescents.[3]

Whereas previous research has established a relation between gender role orientation and self-esteem, and gender role orientation and social conformity, few studies have established a clear relation between all three constructs especially for different age groups. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine the relations between adolescent gender role orientation, self-esteem, and social conformity utilizing two different age groups of adolescents.

Galambos, Peterson, Richards and Gitelsun[4] found that adolescent girls with less positive attitudes toward women were lower in self-esteem. In contrast, Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp[5] noted that older adolescent females whose gender identity incorporated both androgynous and masculine characteristics had

higher levels of self-esteem because of the higher reward value placed on masculine endeavors in our society.

Chronological age has been identified as an important factor in measuring adolescent gender-role orientation and self-esteem.[6] Fisher and Narus[7] studied the association between age and gender role orientation using a cross sectional sample of female adolescents and adults. Age differences were found for those females classified as androgynous but not females classified as sex-typed and undifferentiated. The authors concluded that androgyny may be a developing characteristic appearing later in gender role development. Further, Lamke[8] examined the gender role orientation and self-esteem of 12-15 year-old adolescents and concluded that those adolescents who were classified as masculine or androgynous had the highest levels of self-esteem when compared to subjects classified as feminine or undifferentiated leading the author to conclude that gender role orientation is directly related to self-esteem in younger adolescents.

Another variable that has been associated with gender-role orientation and self-esteem is social conformity.[9] The majority of traditional social conformity studies that have examined gender differences have demonstrated that females are subject to greater conformity than males.[10] However, there is more recent evidence indicating that gender role orientation may influence social conformity. Brown[11] found that females who were more traditional in gender role viewed their reinforcers coming from external

social forces whereas females who were labeled as non-traditional in gender role exhibited more of an internal locus of control.

Adolescent social conformity and its relation to self-esteem has been examined by Cunningham and Berberian[12] who reported that high self-esteem girls between 8-11 years of age scored less internally in locus of control than low self-esteem girls. Subsequent examination of the same sample of adolescent girls indicated that as older adolescents they had reversed the negative relation between self-esteem and internality that was found when they were first examined as younger adolescents.[13] Thus, greater social conformity yielded higher levels of self-esteem during early adolescence, and lower levels of self-esteem during later adolescence.

Theoretical perspective

In past years theorists have differed in how they explain the development of an individual's stereotypical, or traditional, masculine or feminine gender role orientation. According to social learning theorists,[14,15] as children mature, they generalize their learned gender role behaviors to other situations and adapt or change behavior patterns within situations if contingencies of reinforcement or other learning conditions are altered. In contrast, cognitive-developmental theorists[16,17] hold the view that children's interpretations of differences between the sexes change predominantly as a function of cognitive development. The child gradually develops concepts of

"masculinity" and "femininity", and attempts to match his/her behavior to that conception.

A more recent theoretical perspective and one selected as a basis for the present study is the self definition model.[2] Lerner et al. proposed that an individual's self-definition should be compatible with the demands society places on the individual. The basic premise of this theory is that positive personality adjustment in our society requires both masculine and feminine traits. Thus, distinctions between males and females that may have served in acquiring identity in a less complex and technologically advanced era may no longer be adaptive to today's society. This model also reflects a shift away from global, all encompassing efforts to explain gender role behavior to an attempt to explain particular problems or issues related to gender-role development throughout the life cycle.

Based on the aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

1. Female adolescents classified as androgynous or masculine would have higher self-esteem scores than feminine or undifferentiated adolescent females.
2. Female adolescents classified as androgynous or masculine would exhibit more internal locus of control than feminine or undifferentiated adolescent females.
3. Younger adolescent females would have lower self-esteem scores than older adolescent females.

4. Age would be negatively correlated with locus of control scores. That is, younger adolescents would have more external locus of control than older adolescents.
5. Self-esteem scores would be negatively correlated with locus of control scores. That is, adolescents who have a higher level of self-esteem would have more internal locus of control.

Method

Participants

The sample for the study was composed of junior high school and senior high school students from a rural midwestern state. Participants included 87 7th and 8th grade females and 48 11th and 12th grade females. For each test group, 7th and 8th grade participants were categorized into a younger adolescent group and 11th and 12th grade participants were categorized into an older adolescent group.

Instruments

Short Form of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). The short form of the BSRI[18] was used to assess subjects' gender-role orientation. This instrument differs from others that measure gender-role identity in that it treats femininity and masculinity as two independent dimensions rather than as opposite ends on a single dimension. This structure enables the subject to indicate whether she is high on both dimensions (androgynous), low on both

dimensions (undifferentiated), or high on one dimension but low on the other (either masculine or feminine).

The present form of the BSRI contains both a masculinity scale and a femininity scale, each of which contains 30 personality characteristics selected on the basis of sex typed social desirability. That is, a characteristic qualifies as masculine if it is judged to be more desirable for a man than for a woman, and it qualifies as feminine if it is judged to be more desirable for a woman than for a man.

When taking the BSRI, a person is asked to indicate on a 7-point scale how well each of these masculine and feminine personality characteristics describes himself or herself. The scale ranges from 1 (Never or almost never true) to 7 (Always or almost always true). On the basis of the person's responses, each person receives an "Androgyny Score", which is defined as the difference between his or her endorsement of masculine and feminine personality characteristics. The greater the absolute value of the Androgyny Score, the more the person is gender typed or gender reversed, with high positive scores indicating femininity and high negative scores indicating masculinity. As a result of the analysis of each individual's gender-role orientation he or she is classified as either Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous, or Undifferentiated. Bem stated that the test-retest reliability of the BSRI is .93 over a four-week interval.

Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI). Helmreich and Stapp[19] developed the TSBI to measure individual perception of personal worth in social situations. The instrument was designed to eliminate differences in self-esteem scores due to gender differences. The scale has proven itself to assess unitary concept of social self-esteem, in contrast to other self-esteem measures which measure additional concepts of self-esteem.

The sixteen-item form of the Texas Social Behavior Inventory was used to measure self-esteem in this study. The form is composed of statements designed to assess the individual's perceptions of self-confidence and competence in social situations. For each item, respondents are to rate themselves on a five-point scale, varying from "not at all characteristic of me" to "very much characteristic of me." Responses were scored 0 to 4, high scores indicating high self-esteem, and summed to yield individuals' overall scores. The range of possible scores is 0 to 64.

The correlation between the short and long forms has been reported to be .96. For the sixteen-item version, the Cronbach alpha was .91.[19,5]

Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale for Children. The Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale[20] assesses generalized locus of control as related to academic competence and social maturity. Testing of the construct validity of the Nowicki-Strickland resulted in a significant correlation with other

measures of locus of control such as the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility scale, the Bialer-Cromwell, and the Rotter Internal-External Scale. This measure was considered appropriate for the present study because the language of the instrument has been revised and adopted for use with persons of all ages.

The instrument consists of 21 items. Items are answered by checking "yes" or "no" by the corresponding item. A point is given for each score in the external direction, thus, higher scores indicate a greater external orientation.

Internal consistency estimates of the scale have ranged from .63 to .81, with an increase in age. Test-retest reliability among third, seventh, and tenth grades (six weeks apart) ranged from .63 to .71.[20]

Procedure

School administrators of junior and senior high schools were contacted regarding participation in the study and given a description of the study and the testing procedures. After consent for conducting the study was obtained, the experimenter explained the purpose of the study to all the female adolescents in the junior high health classes and the senior high social classes. All participants were administered three instruments during class time in the following order: (a) the Bem Sex Role Inventory, (b) the Texas Social Behavior Inventory, and (c) the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale.

Results

To determine gender and grade differences in self-esteem and locus of control, t-tests were used. Means and standard deviations for dependent measures by grade level are presented in Table 1. Correlations between the Texas Social Behavior Inventory and the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale also were performed.

Insert Table 1 about here

Gender Differences

The first hypothesis stated that female adolescents classified as androgynous or masculine would have higher self-esteem scores than feminine or undifferentiated adolescent females. Analysis of scores for all participants on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) resulted in 71 females classified as female or undifferentiated and 64 females classified as masculine or androgynous. Female adolescents classified as androgynous or masculine had higher mean scores on the TSBI than feminine and undifferentiated females, $t\ (133) = -3.84$, $p < .0002$, indicating a significantly higher level of self-esteem for the androgynous/masculine group.

The second hypothesis stated that female adolescents classified as androgynous or masculine would exhibit more internality in locus of control than feminine or undifferentiated adolescent females. This hypothesis was not supported by the

data for either age group. Although feminine or undifferentiated adolescents had higher mean scores (M=6.78) indicating more external locus of control than androgynous or masculine adolescents (M=6.17), the mean scores were not significantly different.

Age Differences

Hypothesis 3 stated that younger adolescents would have lower self-esteem scores than older adolescents. A t-test yielded no significant differences in mean scores between the junior high and senior high adolescents, indicating no differences in self-esteem.

Hypothesis 4 stated that younger adolescents would have more of an external locus of control than older adolescents. Comparisons between the junior high and senior high groups revealed a significant difference, $t\ (133) = -2.34$ $p < .02$, in locus of control mean scores. Senior high adolescent females tended to be more internal in locus of control and junior high adolescents tended to be more external in locus of control.

Correlation between measures

The fifth hypothesis stated that self-esteem scores would be negatively correlated with locus of control scores. This hypothesis was not supported for either age group. Although the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control was negatively correlated with the TSBI for the total sample ($r = -.123$), this relation was not significant.

Discussion

According to the self definition model of Lerner, Sorrel and Brackney,[2] androgynous and masculine individuals have higher levels of self-esteem as compared with feminine and undifferentiated adolescents because of society's value placed on high levels of masculinity. The results of this investigation are consistent with this theoretical model and previous research[8,5] in that a higher level of self-esteem was found for adolescents who were classified as androgynous and masculine than for adolescents classified as feminine or undifferentiated. Apparently, for both early and middle adolesence periods a female possessing a high combination of feminine and masculine traits, or predominantly masculine traits, perceives herself as more self-worthy.

Deutsch and Gilbert[3] found that a more androgynous gender-role identification resulted in more positive social adjustment in adolescence and adulthood. Androgynous females also have been found to receive higher ratings of peer acceptance than feminine typed classmates.[21] Again, results from the present study lend support to these finding.

The finding that gender-role orientation is not related to social conformity is inconsistent with researchers who have commonly reported an external locus of control as part of the female gender-role stereotype.[10] Brown[11] found that older adolescent females who were non-traditional in their gender-roles were more likely to feel that they had personal control over their

lives. Further, Deaux and Emswiller (1974) suggested that locus of control was affected by one's ability to perform. If the task was consistent with tasks normally performed by a female, she attributed her performance to ability (internal). If the task was inconsistent with tasks normally performed by a female, she attributed her performance to chance (external).

One explanation for this discrepancy in findings may be the result of differential age groups examined across studies. Brown[11] and Deaux and Emswiller[22] used older adolescent females (post high school). The younger adolescents used in the present study may reflect more developmental variability than older adolescents. That is, adolescents between 7th and 12th grades may not be consistent enough in gender role orientation and level of social conformity to establish any clear relations between these variables.

Age was not a significant variable in explaining adolescent self-esteem. Bohan[6] found that 10th graders had lower self-esteem scores than any other junior or senior high grade. Fisher and Narus[7] found the highest levels of self-esteem in older female adolescents. One may cautiously assume that levels of self-esteem rise and fall in various periods during the female's life span. Again, a broader age span of adolescent females may have uncovered this pattern more fully for both self-esteem and social conformity.

There is evidence that children and adolescents develop a more internal locus of control as they increase in age[23,9] The findings of the present study provide further support for this developmental trend.

Current patterns of family structure and socialization may explain why females feel that they have more control over their lives as they mature. Middle-class families of today tend to have fewer children, and space them further apart. Researchers have found parents in these families to be more supportive, less restrictive, and less punitive to their adolescent children.[24] In addition, the opportunity for female adolescents to be involved in more school activities, both social and competitive, as well as the opportunity for choosing from a wide range of non-traditional careers, may contribute to an increasing sense of control over one's destiny.

Self-esteem was hypothesized to be negatively correlated with locus of control among adolescents. However, no significant correlation between the two dependent measures was found. One explanation for this finding is offered by Brown[11] who suggested that females may adopt an external attribution stance as a defense mechanism. This stance allows them to achieve without seeing their behavior as inconsistent with their traditional gender-role orientation. Thus, achievment may result in higher levels of self-esteem and continued social conformity for younger adolescent

females. Whether or not this trend is maintained with older adolescents will have to be determined by further research.

In sum, the results of this study support the notion that female adolescents who have developed high levels of both masculine and feminine traits, or high levels of masculine traits, tend to have a greater feeling of self-worth when compared to female adolescents who are feminine or undifferentiated. Support also was given to the idea that a more internal locus of control develops as the adolescent female advanced in age and that the concept of self-esteem is not related to the concept of locus of control.

References

1. Rosenberg, FR, Simmons, RG: Sex differences in the self concept in adolescence. Sex Roles 1(2):147-159, 1975.

2. Lerner, R, Sorell, G, Brackney, B: Sex differences in self-concept and self-esteem of late adolescents: A time-lag analysis. Sex Roles 7:709-722, 1981.

3. Deutsch, CJ, Gilbert, LA: Sex role stereotypes: Effect on perceptions of self and others and on personal adjustment. J of Couns Psychol 23(4):373-379, 1976.

4. Galambros, NL, Petersen, AC, Richards, M, Gitelson, IB: The attitudes toward women scale for adolescents (AWSA): A study of reliability and validity. Sex Roles 13(5-6):343-356, 1985.

5. Spence, JT, Helmreick, R, Stapp, J: Ratings of self and peers on sex role attributes and their relation to self-esteem and conceptions of masculinity and femininity. J of Pers and Soc Psychol 32:29-39, 1975.

6. Bohan, JS: Age and sex differences in self-concept. Adoles 8:379-384, 1973.

7. Fischer, JL, Narus, LR: Sex-role development in late adolescence and adulthood. Sex Roles 7:97-106, 1981.

8. Lamke, LK: The impact of sex-role orientation on self-esteem in early adolescence. Child Dev 53:1530-1535, 1982.

9. Richards, JM, Jr: Validity of locus of control and self-esteem measures in a national longitudinal study. Educ and Psychol Meas 43:897-905, 1983.

10. Maccoby, EE, Jacklin, CN: The Psychology of Sex Differences. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974.

11. Brown, R: Locus of control and sex role orientation of women graduate students. Coll Stud J 17(1):10-12, 1983.

12. Cunningham, T, Berberian, V: Sex differences in the relationship of self-concept to locus of control in children. Pers and Soc Psychol Bull 2:277-281. 1976.

13. Wallace, JR, Cunningham, TF, Monte, VD: Changes in relationship between self-esteem and locus of control. The J of Soc Psychol 124:261-162, 1984.

14. Bandura, A. Social learning theory. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977.

15. Huston, AC: Sex-typing. In P.H. Mussen (Ed.). Handbook of Child Psychology: 4th Edition. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983.

16. Kohlberg, L: A cognitive-developmental analysis of children's sex role concepts and attitudes. In E. Maccoby (Ed.), The development of sex differences (pp. 82-173). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966.

17. Ullian, D: The development of conceptions of masculinity and femininity. In B. Lloyd & J. Archer (Eds.), Exploring sex differences (pp. 25-47). New York: Academic Press, 1976.

18. Bem, S: Sex-role adaptability: One consequence of psychological androgyny. J of Pers and Soc Psychol 31:634-643, 1975.

19. Helmreich, R, Stapp, J: Short forms of the Texas Social Behavior Inventory, an objective measure of self esteem. Bull of the Psycho Soc 4:473-475, 1974.

20. Nowicki, S, Strickland, BR: A locus of control scale for children. J of Consult and Clin Psychol 40:148-154, 1973.

21. Massad, CM: Sex role identity and adjustment during adolescence. Child Dev 52:1290-1298, 1981.

22. Deaux, K, Emswiller, T: Explanations of successful performance on sex-linked tasks: What is skill for the male is luck for the female. J of Pers and Soc Psychol 29(1):80-85, 1974.

23. Brown, D, Fulkerson, KF, Furr, S, Ware, WB, Voight, NL: Locus of control, sex role orientation and self-concept in black and white third- and sixth-grade male and female leaders in a rural community. Dev Psychol 20(4):717-721, 1984.

24. Richardson, RA, Abramowitz, RH, Asp, CE, Petersen, AC: Parent-child relationships in early adolescence: Effects of family structure. J of Marr and the Fam 48:805-811, 1986.

Table 1

t-tests for dependent variables by gender orientation and grade

Dependent Variable	Gender Orientation: Masculine/Androgynous n=64		Gender Orientation: Feminine/Undifferentiated n=71			Grade: 7th/8th n=87		Grade: 11th/12th n=48		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	M	SD	M	SD	t
Texas Social Behavior Inventory	39.09	5.88	35.04	6.33	-3.84**	37.03	6.53	36.83	6.29	-0.17
Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control	6.17	3.55	6.79	3.61	1.00	7.02	3.44	5.54	3.67	-2.34*

*p < .02

**p < .002